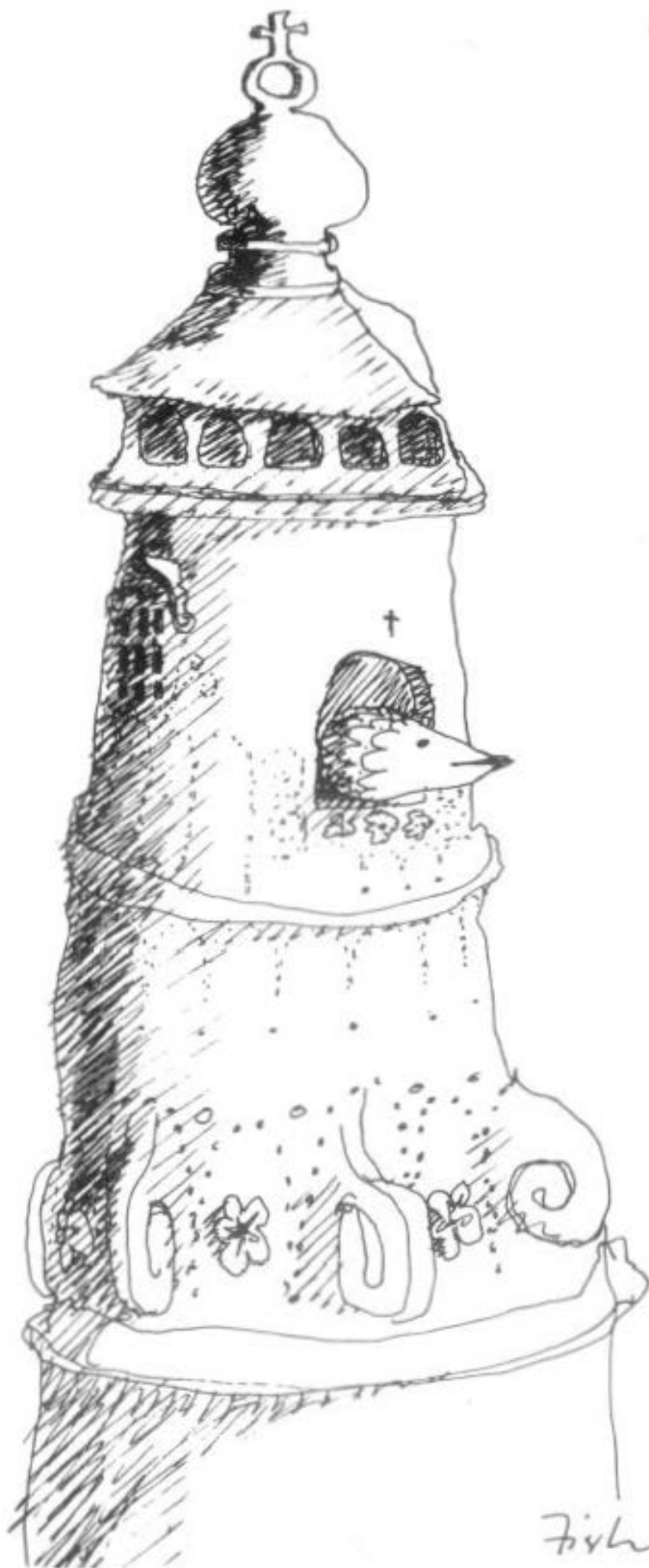


WESTERN POTTER



... Cover

by Bill Fisher

I am celebrating editing my first issue of the "Western Potter" by being flattened by the 'flu bug. However, I think I'm on the mend; at least I no longer shiver and sweat at the same time, and I'm considering having something to eat, even though it could mean survival.

I knew Gillian Hodge would be difficult to follow in a job like this, but I hadn't counted on contending with the 'flu as well.

I'm still rather vague about a few things - like, who is Bill Fisher? I think he must be a Nelson potter. All I really know is that I would like very much to see some of his pottery, and I'm delighted with his drawing on the cover.

When I was in England last summer I was surprised at how many English potters fire with electricity. I had pictured them all laboring, a la Leach, with wood or dirty old oil, sweating and sooty, while the smoke and flames poured from the peepholes and chimney -- but no -- so often prosaic little boxes heated by electricity. Back home in B.C. I'm delighted to find gas kilns popping up like mushrooms all over the place. I decided it would be interesting to hear about a few of them, hence the descriptions by Heinz Laffin, Irene Perry and Frances Hatfield, and Marjorie Roberts.

We are indebted to Jean Marie Weakland for all the photos in this issue, and I'd like to express my gratitude for the great co-operation I've had from all contributors.

The deadline for items for the next issue is June 15th, and I'd like particularly to hear from anyone using local materials.

Aside from the fiery contribution from Robin Peck, we seem to be lacking in the field of reviews of shows. How about some volunteer reporting on shows in Vancouver?

Hoping to hear from you.

Ruth Meechan

1.

ONE POTTER'S CREED

Reality and fantasy and their dualism are my main exploration areas in ceramics, using hand-built ceramic sculptures as the art form tool. There seems to me to be a necessity to find and express something real, as real as inside me. And yet the art object must have validity in its own right also; it must express a feeling of aliveness. It must be a unique living organism in its own right without the signature of an artist propping it up or peddling it. But I as an artist must be able to express my fantasies; in this sense the art pieces I produce are my children, extensions of myself and yet independent organisms functioning on their own merit. What is real? What is fantasy? To me they are the same and yet completely contradictory - it makes life interesting. The sculptures are real in that they can be touched, contemplated, broken, enjoyed and used by others, but the ideas out of which they come are from a dream world which I allow myself to indulge in and enjoy and project on the rest of you.

The feeling of life in a piece as a theory is difficult for me to express. Eskimo carvings have it and even though I don't care for them, I appreciate the Eskimos for this quality. It is a feeling that I get that the sculpture is functioning; not as you and I do (that would be ridiculous), but as a piece of art functions that is alive. It must have a feeling of history and memories, joys on summer afternoons and deaths. It must express the mystery of a complete world just beyond the fringe of reality where we would like to visit but cannot because we would refuse to stay or understand. That, I think, is what I mean by an independent existence. My art also is as close as I can come to expressing my exploration of my dream worlds and yet these pieces are only a translation, a separate existence which I enjoy as much as, I hope, you do. It is a game of mutual friends playing on each other just for the hell of it; for the joy of being and hearing the music.

Physically, I prefer to work with organic forms, usually with an unorganic contrast which seems to create a surrealistic

quality. This really looks odd, since the pieces usually look sort of rustic and peasantlike. But they seem to hold together. I don't like throwing, because I don't have the patience to learn the techniques and skills necessary - blomp! I'm lazy. Tongue in cheek comments by friends say my works look like glorified wedding cakes, which is also true. But it really doesn't matter, don't you see, because it is alive, and with that one little essence of the cosmos or whatever going for it, it really doesn't matter if it looks like a mid-Victorian abortion, it is still doing its thing and really great art.

Bill Fisher

IRENE PERRY'S KILN IN NORTH BURNABY

Our kiln is natural gas, and it cost approx. \$600 to build. Of course, the cost would be quite a bit more, but I was blessed with a "scrounger" husband, who does not believe in buying new pipes or couplings, etc., unless he has to, and doing all the work himself, which again saves on cost. However, we did use all new bricks.

It took him (with my help) about one month to build it, and another month prior to that was spent in the library studying books on kilns. The one he finally used was "Kilns" by Daniel Rhodes.

The kiln is 38 cu.ft. inside, and it's a downdraft. It has 6 atmospheric burners in 5"x5½" portholes, and the flue is 9"x9" and 9 ft.6" high. Inside, bag walls are 32" high and it has a "corbal" arch.

- very nice looking - curious neighbours thought it was a giant barbeque. And they were a bit scared the first time we fired and we developed a windstorm which made the flames spout out about six feet high out the portholes. I was shaking at the knees myself - it was me against the elements until husband came home and told me it could not back-fire into the gas pipes and blow up my house, which is six feet away. We did get a beautiful reduction fire (real heavy for last hour).

This is only our third firing so far. It's pretty even temp. all over, and we don't feel we would change it if we built again.

As for types of glazes, we're still novices at it, we've had good and bad. But we high fire to cone 10, it takes 17 hours to fire and we go into slight reduction from 1800 F., on heavy reduction at $8\frac{1}{2}$ to 9, and rapid cooling down to 1000 (Mike Cardeau Firing Schedule).

My house is without heat when we fire as we're on a low pressure service. The first time we didn't reach cone 9 as the kiln was not loaded properly. So we called for a "kiln doctor" (Don Hutchinson) who came when called at 9 at night, and we found out that we had too much space between pots, etc., and a few other tips, such as - all pots the same size on one shelf, 2" from bagwalls and ceiling, space between middle of shelves for flames to circulate, and no more than $\frac{1}{4}$ " apart for pots, and use lots of cones.

I do three months steady potting to fill it, and the cost for firing in winter is 7 to 8 dollars. And we're looking forward again to our next firing.

Irene Perry

HEINZ LAFFIN'S KILN ON HORNBY ISLAND

I am delighted to pass on some information about my kiln. It was built as a joint effort by Wayne Ngan, Jack Wells and myself when Wayne and I moved to Hornby in 1967.

Type: Two chamber downdraft, Propane fired.

The people who attended Paul Soldner's kiln building workshop in Seattle 1967, will remember the 2 chamber updraft kiln we built there. I adopted the basic design with certain modifications, e.g. increased capacity, baffle walls instead of under floor firing, incorporating by-pass in the flue system etc.

Size: Glost chamber: approx. 36x36x50 (height) inches
(40 cu.ft.)

Bisque chamber: approx. 2/3 size of glost chamber.

Height of stack: Almost 20 ft. (inside dimension: $13\frac{1}{2}$ x $13\frac{1}{2}$ "
4.

I was lucky enough to get second-hand bricks from the old coke ovens at Union Bay on Vancouver Island most of which have a slight taper (ideal for building a shallow arch) the coke ovens being of the bee-hive type. We used over 3000 fire bricks in the construction of the kiln plus stack.

Cost of kiln incl. stack: less than \$1,000.

Cost of Propane Installation incl. burners: over \$400.

I use 6 venturi type burners on the glost chamber and 1 on the bisque chamber with a maximum capacity of over 2 million B.T.U. 4 burners fire against a 24" baffle wall made of carborundum shelves about 5" from the wall at one end of the glost chamber, 2 more are facing each other at the other end close to the entry into the bisque chamber.

The flue extends into the first chamber so that it can be fired independently. The entry into the flue can be opened during the firing in order to draw the heat down to the bottom of the kiln which tends to be cooler in downdraft kins. This way the temperature evens out beautifully and a variation of more than one cone is unusual.

Firing: I light up at 8.00 in the morning and reach a good cone 9 between 10.00 - 12.00 p.m. depending on the weather, stacking, etc. I used to reduce slightly by introducing extra gas through pilots from about cone 1 almost to the end finishing up with oxidation. I now seem to achieve the same result by reducing heavily for 2 or 3 periods of 15 minutes each during that same time by putting on pilots, closing down primary air intake completely and damper slightly - this way using much less gas which is an important factor to consider as the transportation cost of propane makes it rather expensive (almost 10% of product).

Cost per Firing: \$20 - \$25. I fire every two weeks. - I use mostly wood ash glazes and I am quite happy with the results. Don't feel I could improve much on my kiln.

Heinz Laffin

FRANCES HATFIELD'S KILN IN THE OKANAGAN

This propane kiln was built over a period of about two years. Through inexperience and lack of a totally coherent plan we did waste money. A good example being the welding of a frame which was obviously too small and which had to be knocked down and finally re-welded into long uprights to brace the corners of the chimney. Having got that mistake behind us we managed to blunder into a few minor ones, but not of serious cost or consequence.

After pouring over the few available books we could lay hands on, we set forth during hot August with the willing help of Jean-Marie Weakland, Walter Dexter and Wendy Birch. A good foundation had already been laid up, of concrete block going down four feet to avoid the chance of deep winter freezing getting under the works. In one week of heat and beer our foursome laid up the walls, built the arch form and laid on most of the arch. Inner brick is first quality skagits but the outer are fire brick seconds which gave us more trouble than the saving was worth because they were warped and cracked. But, with fire-clay mortar up she went. Later the angle of the arch had to be changed so we tore it down and re-built it three times before we were satisfied (or is one ever satisfied?). The kiln is about forty-two cubic foot capacity and fires with 4 burners built by Jack Wells. The local gas firm did all the lines and connections back to the 1000 gallon propane tank. Burner ports are about 4x4 inches each and are staggered, in other words, not facing directly at one another across the kiln. The baffle walls are 26 inches high at the back and about 23 toward the door of the kiln. They are made of old kiln shelves, totally overlapping one another and are set 4 inches inside the inner walls. The kiln door is quite large, has to be bricked up each time, taking well over an hour and is an infernal nuisance, so that is due for a change after I take a good look at some of these new space age materials. The whole beast is caged in a welded frame, of course. The chimney, built of fire brick for the first 4 ft. and then old commons up to 14 ft. is probably going to prove the weakest link, as the commons have cracked

in long vertical cracks near the corners. However, as noted above, they are contained by angle iron bracings. Aloft we have set an old water heater, which gives an extra two and a half feet of stack and makes all the visitors think we heat our house off the kiln. We added this interesting after-thought because we experienced back pressure in the first couple of firings. This addition certainly helped but so did the kiln shed we built around it later.

We fire to cone 9 and it takes, depending on the weather, from 12 to 15 hours. Results, considering the fact that I really haven't finished getting to know the behemoth yet, are pleasing. We bring down cone 9 very evenly all over the kiln and can't say we have any particularly cold spots. It does not call for any particular variety of glazes to accommodate the temperature differences because they aren't great at all. Reduction takes place at cones 1, 3 and 8. I guess by most standards I don't reduce very heavily but I can get some nice copper reds. Haven't tried celadons yet. I constantly alter the stacking in the middle and front areas but leave the back alone, never removing the shelves, simply because it's such a back breaker to put them in and out. This was a design mistake on my part, too deep a chamber for convenient loading. Also the flue chamber could have been built lower, had I known more about flues, and I'd have wasted less space in the kiln bottom. That flue is the main point I'd change if I were to build again.

The whole thing, including the first filling of the 1000 gallon tank, but excluding any wages of course, cost \$2,000. It costs about \$20 to \$30 per firing. This seems a wide fluctuation and may have something to do with the variation of firings from summer temperatures to zero weather. I think in the future I'll try to curb the number of winter firings because it's a cold experience to stack at zero temperature and probably quite wasteful of fuel. But I'm still doing a lot of learning, not having had the opportunity to ever fire or fiddle with a gas kiln before. And I wouldn't have missed the hard work, companionship, problems of building or the excitement of firing the beast for anything.

Frances Hatfield

MARJORIE ROBERT'S KILN IN COURTENAY

- DECISIONS, DECISIONS, or How to Live Dangerously in the Backyard.

The following is an account of the conception and birth of a 20 cu.ft. 2 burner propane gas downdraft kiln, capable of reaching cone 10 in 8 hours. Three or four years of potting, using an electric kiln had gradually sharpened my appreciation of the fine art of potting as practised by those enviable owners of kilns producing flame heat.

Avidly I devoured the written words of the master potters, suffered through their experiments with them, drew pictures of modest little beehive structures burning wood, which were described in detail. I even built such a little model, making clay bricks to shape up the top, with a fire under a grating. I spent the whole of a happy day squatted beside this adobe structure in the back yard, poking small sticks in the fire box and being rewarded with lots of smoke from the vent. The results of this entertaining pastime were a few tiny pots which barely reached soft bisk with soot decorations.

The next try was after a very informative summer class. With the inspired direction of the instructor, an 18" brick updraft kiln was constructed at the beach. The efforts of the class went into sawing and splitting enough cedar to bring this up to salt glaze temperature. Relays of firemen cut, split and stoked, and finally salted the fire. Midday lunch was further enriched with oysters gathered on the spot and roasted in the excess embers (the pots were successfully glazed too). But the method left one with great admiration for those hardy orientals who stoke and fire for three days.

Back home this prompted another backyard effort to do a similar thing in a downdraft design using oil-soaked wood and a blower from the vacuum cleaner. No go! Too many things against it, however it did turn out some nice smoked salmon later with alder wood.

Then along came the BOOK. You know the one I mean, about kilns. Then the plotting and planning. Re-read Leach, re-read 8.

Rhodes, begin to draw. Now the drawings are to scale. Read and re-read information on burners. Find out the local regulation on L.P.G. Ponder interior measurements, decide. Calculate burners necessary. Calculate flue and chimney according to advice of the above gentlemen, allowing the flue to be extra large. You can always close it up later, but you could not enlarge it if it's too small. What kind of bricks, hard vs. soft - decide. Insulation or air space, decide. What kind of arch? Where to build it? What kind of foundation? Decide, decide. Find the man who makes burners. Listen to his advice. Talk to other owners and listen to theirs. Finalize the plans and proceed firmly with what is decided. No one can really tell you - yes it's good or no, it's bad. Bully friend husband to make a start. Argue your way throughout the building, don't be persuaded to change horses in midstream. Nag some more until it gets finished. Now it's up ...

It took these materials: cement for slab base, gravel under that of course; 25 cement blocks to raise it to a comfortable height; about 300 good hard fired bricks, plus arch bricks calculated by the brickyard; 400 or so old bricks for the outside; 9 cement chimney blocks; 2 burners and assorted pipe. Also required was a long-suffering husband with experience in cement and brick work. The cost of all this will vary with the availability of materials; you can get some close idea by pricing the above in your neighbourhood. The gas company here charged about \$100 for the hooking up of the pipes, plus rental on tank, plus gas. It appears to cost about \$10 per firing based on one a month, adding the rental in.

Am I happy with it? Like a dog with two tails. No, it does not fire evenly, but evenly enough. I heeded the warning from a Portland potter about the bag wall. His first tryout had a half a cone difference in one part of his kiln. So he altered the spacing of the bricks in the wall. Well, then he had a whole cone difference, and worse, he had not made a careful note of his first arrangement. With the result it took nearly a year of firing to get it adjusted again to be as efficient.

I don't find so far that having a lower maturing glaze is of much help for the cool corners I have. First I don't know until I load, what shape or height of piece is going to fit the cool spot. If you have

lots of bisk to choose from, you could conceivably go from the loading, to pick out the suitable shape, and providing said glaze is also suitable to the suitable shape, glaze and add. I just stand a flat brick to form a heat reflector in a cool spot. The interior still seems pretty roomy to me after electric kilns, and I don't worry about a little unused space.

Marjorie Roberts

UMPTEN POTTERS THROWING

Sunday, March 28th Rain deluged the city and the uninformed observer might well be forgiven if he expressed surprise at the eager step of those who ducked through an unobtrusive doorway in a back alley off Tenth Avenue. True, they didn't knock thrice and wait for a password, but inside the Guild workshop had an unmistakable air of camaradie.

An all-day session hosted by Avery Huyghe in her well equipped school. We were treated to Alice Bradbury showing us the finer details of plate throwing; I'm sure Alice almost completed a dinner service by the time we called it a day. Don Hutchinson, with the ease of a natural teacher, whipped through an amazing amount of varied techniques. I hope Langara students realize how fortunate they are. Avery was muttering incantations over a large pot she was coiling and throwing. Flames licked the rim as she tried an "anything goes" way to stiffen the clay.

How does Garry make those earthy hand-built mugs of his? He showed us. Donna McClaren has a real way of hand building with stretched textured clay, whilst Meg Buckley must pull the fastest handle in the West!

Snatches of conversation buzzed to and fro, acquaintances were made and renewed. Dave surveyed the scene with a grandfatherly twinkle in his eye; Jean-Marie perched with camera for an angled shot. Fay showed us the unorthodox way works just fine.

It was a great way to spend a day, and for a wet Sunday afternoon what more could a potter ask?

Brenda Davie

BELIEVE IT OR NOT - A MAN WHO CAN MAKE

ELECTRONIC CONTROLS

I recently spent a very enjoyable evening at Fay Tevendale's with good food and drink, interesting people, lively conversation, and a chance to meet the man who made the electronic control on Fay's kiln.

His name is Charles McLennon, and the control he has installed for Fay replaces switches and enables her to control the amount of voltage going into the kiln by turning a dial. Voltage is controlled, without steps, from almost zero to the line voltage, so that she can start it out heating slowly, and speed it up whenever she wants to, and as much as she wants, throughout the firing.

It is not automatic; she must be there to turn it on, change it, check the cones, and turn it off; but he plans to build a program timer, so that you could set your own program, say a rise of 300 degrees an hour for a definite time or to a certain temperature, or both. It could be made to turn the kiln off then or hold that temperature until you arrived to check the cones. Personally, I'm a firm believer in cones being the surest indication of whether it's time to turn things off.

Mr. McLennon also builds wheels with the same form of control, which allows variable speed without steps from a foot pedal, or it can be set to hold one speed.

If you are interested, Mr. McLennon can be contacted through Fay.

Ruth Meehan

SOME NOTES on STACKING THE GLAZE KILN

So you keep the shelves from touching the back wall and stagger them vertically; you put the bulkier pieces in the middle, tapering off to smaller ones at the edges, and have a finger-width between all pots. What more can you do?

Some years ago, when I was wrestling inch-thick silicon carbide shelves in and out of the kiln, I began to think about the amount of space the shelves took and even worked it out - it came to nearly 10% of the available space in a typical firing. I wondered more, though, about the effect of so much dense material on the rate of climb of the heat.

Shelf-cleaning is an unpopular and time-consuming job and there is usually more of it in a school than in a production pottery. To save the shelves we began using clay discs beneath each piece, and this in turn suggested how fewer shelves could be used to hold the same number of pots. Taller posts, and the pieces overlapping each other, supported on short posts and clay discs, thus:

(turn to centre page)





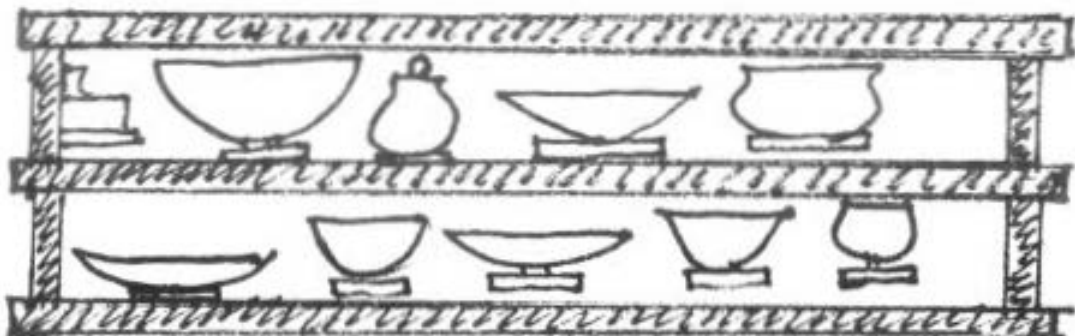
PRIMITIVE FIRING

at the annual picnic
at Iris Smith's.





instead of:



This open arrangement doesn't, I think, get more pieces into a given space, but it does allow the heat to circulate faster and more evenly, and is besides a great muscle-saver.

The discs can be made of any scrap clay, preferably with added grog. We make them in all sizes and different thicknesses up to $\frac{1}{4}$ ". They are grooved, dried slowly between boards, biscuit-fired, and dipped in kiln-wash. If a student has overdone the glaze and it drips off the foot, no harm done - the disc can be tossed out. Short of this, they last a long time, and shelves need cleaning and rewashing only once a term.

Avery Hays



SUNDAY WORKSHOP -
UMPTEN POTTERS THROWING
(and otherwise building)

Left: Garry Kozel makes a
slab mug.

Right: Avery Huyghe,
Brenda Davie, and
Fay Tevendale

co-operate on a coil-slab-
thrown pot with unorthodox
method of drying.



SHOW

Who knows what a show is? You? Entertainment? A display, a sale, a record of achievement, or a work of art in itself? The recent show in the gallery of the Kootenay School of Art with Frances Hatfield's and Bob Kingsmill's pots, and Mary Turk's paintings encompasses several show types. It provides an easy, acceptable balance of divergencies. In this, perhaps, lies its weakness. In trying to stretch too thin with its limited resources, the show failed in several areas.

As entertainment the show appealed to only a select few, most of them sharing certain philosophies in common with the potters. As a sale, I doubt if it was as successful as "Blue Mountain" pot shows. As a display of new work and as a record of achievement the fabric of the show began to wear thin. Mary Turk's paintings have been seen before and quite some time ago. I may be wrong but I don't think the paintings in the show were done in the last twelve months. Frances Hatfield's pots, I suppose, are new but seem the same (with inconsistent features still apparant). Bob Kingsmill's pots have changed, although whether something has been achieved or not is open to question.

As a work of art in itself the show came off reasonably well considering factors such as a closet-gallery with interior decorating by Kootenay Linoleum. My main gripe here is the way so many potters have to bring their inspiration with them as a support. The pots are a final product. And as pottery is more product oriented than most arts, I believe it is the product that is to be shown, NOT a delicately arranged, tasteless combination of weeds popping out of pots, and logs holding them out. A suburban tacky-tack in the midst of the wilderness in an apt analogy, if reversed. The pottery in the show was of sufficient quality to make "accent" unneeded.

About Frances's pots I have little to say. There is really nothing wrong with them. They are safe but good. Some, especially earthenware, I found a little gaudy, but basically it is a slight inconsistency that puts them off. There may be a subtlety that I am unaware of. I feel a danger, however, of confusing subtlety and obscurity. These great axioms of pottery: Zen, Earth - fire, individual craftsman, master - apprentice, I find trying at least. Okay. Frances has a belief in good, functional pottery. Enough. For some people a subtle piece of pottery is just not enough for today.

Amazed. Mary Turk frightens me. Everyone will defend her except people who know her only through paint. Aside from saying I saw something like them in my doctor's office, how can I describe a Turk? Take some color field, add a little action a la Matta and you may have one. Overworked, just the right size for the office, nice, safe and obviously very saleable. The paintings, however, were old and there may be something new in the works. Also, Mary is a potter, so, although I haven't seen any yet, I'm hopeful.

Bob Kingsmill. A man. Here I am then, in the wilderness defying another man. But it's a long way from Kelowna to Nelson and I feel reasonably safe. Bob, judging from his pottery, is in the throes of change, revival, extinction, metamorphosis, plagiarism, or none, or all. I have seen in the gallery, courtesy of Bob, pots, large and small, decorated with bright underglaze in floral and abstract motifs reminiscent of pre-columbian American ware. The good thing about them to me is their dissimilarity to past work. This may be the opening up of a new concept, or a sale. I, though, am wary of the artist who is able to switch directly into the mainstream of another style from which he is accustomed in so short a time. The question which arises is, of course, did Bob have a previous style or direction? I would incline to say no. Therefore, as this is Bob's first direction, criticism is hardly necessary. In a while, perhaps.

Kingsmill is not through, however, and neither is Frances. I should like, however, as a rearguard action, to make a statement concerning sculpture and/or sculptural pots on display. We certainly haven't come far from early fifties academic expressionism. The second string is still there. Ceramic is a wonderful medium for sculpture. When it is successful it is great; when it is not, it is pathetic. And this sculpture is pathetic. I truly feel it. Unimportant, ugly, non-massive, easy to accept as art and infinitely saleable. I do not mind people doing them, but it is a shame to have them exhibited with good work and seen by people who consider them indicative of the state of modern sculpture.

That's it. I'm waiting for fan mail.

Robin Peck

And I'm waiting too, for lot's of angry reaction, pro and con, and emphatic. Don't sputter to your friends over coffee, get it down on paper and let's hear from you. Bob and Frances, I'm waiting for you to pin his ears back.

Editor

A NOTE OF THANKS IS A BEAUTIFUL THING

I wonder if it could be possible to make an accurate estimate of the number of hours of work that go into making a success of the Hycroft sale each year. Planning begins six months before the sale, and before it is over dozens of people have put in hundreds of hours of volunteer labor for which they get no personal reward whatever except the knowledge of a job well done. And rare it is, indeed, but very lovely, to get a note such as the following:

B.C.Potters Guild:

I received my cheque in payment of sale of my pots. I must commend the people who handled that sale, real professional! They are under the impression one of my pots was stolen. Not so. All is correct and accounted for. I experimented with earthenware with decoration, I learned a lot there. However, live and learn. Thanks a million.

Yours respectfully,

A. Olson

(Thank you, Mr. Olson, from all of us who worked on Hycroft).

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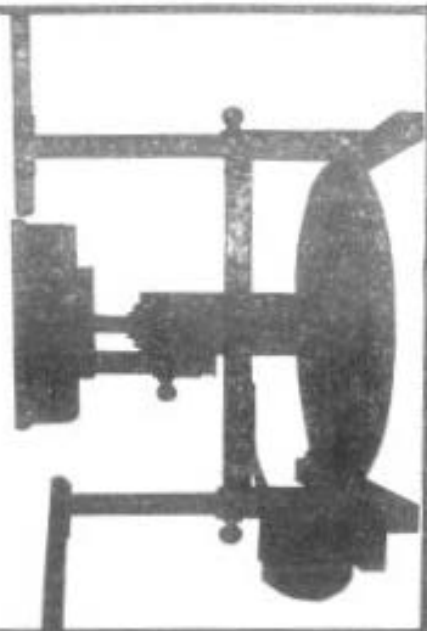
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Editor: Ruth Meechan
11785 - 252 St.
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Note: Permission should be requested from the B.C. Guild of Potters to reprint any part of this publication

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